

Basics of Search Engine Friendly Web Site Design for Web Designers & Developers

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About this guide

We've developed this guide to provide the basics of designing and developing a search engine friendly for the designers and developers we work with.

Some of this we have developed over years and some of it comes from other sources such as Google's SEO Starter Guide, <http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2008/11/googles-seo-starter-guide.html>

You are free to pass it along to the designers and developers you work with as a primer.

SEO Definition

In Search Engine Optimization we improve results from the traditional search listings often referred to as the "editorial", "organic", or "natural" results.

Search engine optimization affects only organic search results, not paid or "sponsored" results, such as Google AdWords

The image shows a screenshot of a Google search results page for the query "baseball cards". The search bar at the top shows the query and a "Search" button. Below the search bar, there are navigation tabs for "Web", "Shopping", "News", and "Books". The results are displayed in a grid format. On the left side, there are organic search results, including "Baseball Card | Value Price Guide | Selling Cards Worth" from CardPricer.com, "Baseball Cards Only - The Ultimate Card Shop on the Web" from bbonly.com, and "Baseball Cards 1887-1914" from loc.gov. On the right side, there are sponsored links, including "Sell Your Baseball Cards" from kityoung.com, "Get Baseball Cards" from baseballboss.com, "Baseball Cards" from eBay.com, "No Reserve Sports Auction" from bidonsports.net, "Buy Baseball Hobby Boxes" from DIACardWorld.com, "Baseball Display Cases" from displaygifts.com, and "Charm City Baseball Cards" from charmcitycards.com. A large, bold, black text overlay reading "'Paid' Search, AdWords" is positioned over the sponsored links section. The word "Organic Search" is written in a large, bold, black font over the organic search results section.

Site Navigation

Good practices for site navigation

Create a naturally flowing hierarchy - Make it as easy as possible for users to go from general content to the more specific content they want on your site. Add navigation pages when it makes sense and effectively work these into your internal link structure.

Avoid:

- creating complex webs of navigation links, e.g. linking every page on your site to every other page
- going overboard with slicing and dicing your content (it takes twenty clicks to get to deep content)

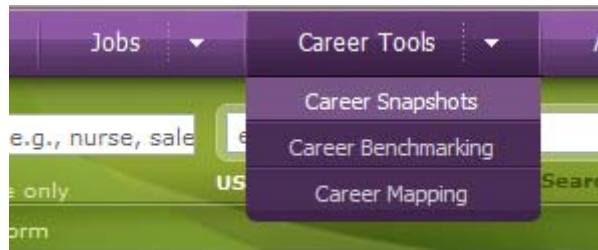
Use mostly text for navigation - Controlling most of the navigation from page to page on your site through text links makes it easier for search engines to crawl and understand your site. Many users also prefer this over other approaches, especially on some devices that might not handle Flash or JavaScript.

Avoid:

- having a navigation based entirely on drop-down menus, images, or animations (many, but not all, search engines can discover such links on a site, but if a user can reach all pages on a site via normal text links, this will improve the accessibility of your site;

Problems with Cascading Drop-down Menu Systems

In some cases, Cascading Drop-down Menu navigation systems that are employed on web sites are problematic for the search engines to follow.



A Cascading Drop-down Menu

The typical issue is that the links in the “fly-out” sub menus can not be followed by search engines, usually caused by using JavaScript to control them.

It's ideal to employ a search engine friendly navigation system so that search engines

can follow the links to the inner pages. This can also help with search rankings.

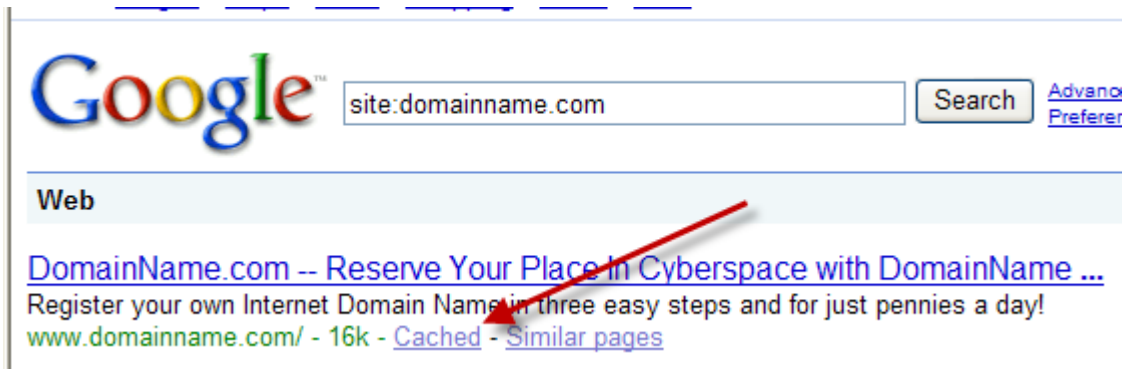
Some resources about this issue –

<http://www.seoconsultants.com/css/tips/>

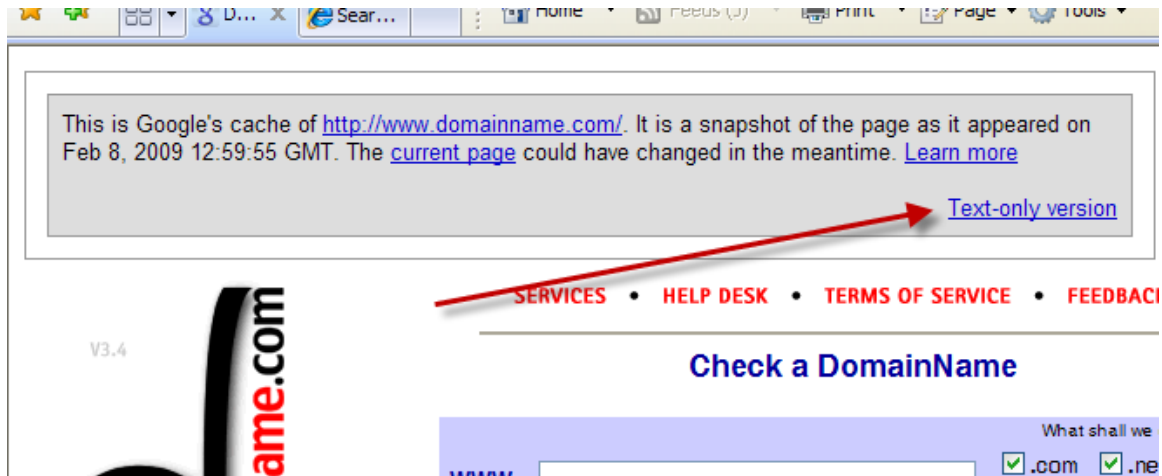
Search on “suckerfish menus”

How to see if your navigation system is search engine friendly

1. Do a search in Google to get a list of the pages indexed in Google, for example: “site:domainname.com”
2. In the search engine results, Click on the [Cached](#) Link. Do this for a few pages such as the home page and couple of inner pages:



3. When Google's cache of the page appears click on the “Text-only Version” link:



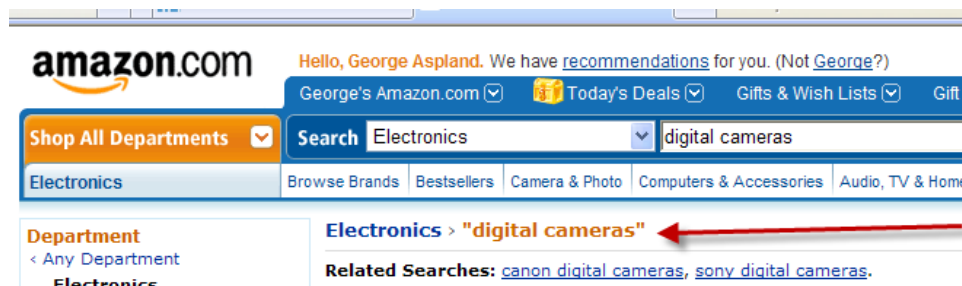
4. Scan through the text only version and see if Google shows all the links in your drop down menu, including the links in the flouts'. If so, the menu system should be search engine friendly.

Secondary navigation schemes

A secondary navigation scheme helps both your human visitors and search engines navigate a web site.

"breadcrumb" navigation –

A breadcrumb is a row of internal links at the top or bottom of the page that allows visitors to quickly navigate back to a previous section or the root page. Many breadcrumbs have the most general page (usually the root page) as the first, left-most link and list the more specific sections out to the right.



"breadcrumb" navigation

Bottom or footer navigation systems

There are a few navigation systems typically employed at the bottom of all or most pages such as in a footer.

For example, you could include text links to important pages in a footer in a pyramid arrangement. However you can only fit a limited number of links in this manner before it gets impractical.

Below is a screen shot from the bottom of the weather.com pages of a navigation scheme you could employ in the bottom of site pages.

This is a search engine friendly way to add a fair amount of links to important pages. It's also useful for visitors who scroll all the way to the bottom of a page.

The screenshot shows the bottom of a weather.com page. At the top, there is a blue link: [FREE Trial: Larger Radar Maps & No Ads - Learn More](#). Below that is a "Branford Classified Ads" section with tabs for "JOBS", "LAKE RENTALS", and "BEACH RENTALS". The "JOBS" tab is active, showing a search form for "Find your dream job in Branford:" with fields for "Enter keywords:", "City: Branford", and "State: CT", and a "SEARCH JOBS" button. Below the search form is a purple banner: "Employers: To hire top employees in Branford, click here." Below the search form is a navigation bar with tabs: "Yesterday", "Today", "Tomorrow", "Radar Map", "Hour-by-Hour", "Weekend", "10-Day", and "Month". Below the navigation bar is a search bar: "Search the Web" with a "Search" button and "powered by Google". Below the search bar is a grid of links organized into five columns: "Weather" (Top 100 Cities, Search by State, Local Guides, Weather Encyclopedia, Free Weather Alerts), "Downloads" (Desktop Weather, IE Toolbar, Firefox Weather Extension, Screensaver, Widgets & Gadgets, More Downloads), "Mobile" (Free Mobile Web, Phone Downloads, PDA Downloads, Video, Text Alerts, More Mobile Services), "Weather Anywhere" (Weather on Your Website, Download Partners, RSS Feeds, More Weather Tools, Notify: Severe Weather Alerts), and "International Weather" (Brazil, France, Germany, Latin America, UK & Ireland, India). At the bottom, there is a "More Great Sites" section with links: "Vacation Home Rentals", "TWC Store", "The Weather Channel Kids", "Climate & Green Living", and "WeatherBnk". A red arrow points from the "Hour-by-Hour" tab to the "Mobile" column.

Site map

You should include a visible site map in any but the smallest of web sites. This helps both search engines and site visitors navigate a web site.

Note we are not talking about an XML site map, rather a standard HTML page meant to be easy for humans to use. Some XML site map utilities will create a visible site map page, but we haven't seen any that are very user friendly.

Use standard HTML text navigation to the pages listed on the site map. Keep the site map page simple, using no graphics.

Here is a site map example –

[Site Map for XXX](#)

The Elgin Area Chamber of Commerce has an honored history for being the leader in the Fox Valley business community. We are the largest professional organization of our kind in Northern Kane County.

To go to any of the pages on our web site, please select one of the links below:

[Home](#)

[Elgin Area Business Search](#)

Search for Chamber businesses in the Elgin, Illinois area.

[Elgin Chamber - In the News](#)

Read recent news about the Chamber and Elgin community.

[Economic Development](#)

If you are a current Elgin business or a prospective business, or site consultant, we provide the community and economic facts you need.

[Our Community](#)

Read details and view photos of the Elgin community.

- [Calendar](#)
- [Elgin History](#)
- [Arts](#)
- [City Government](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Healthcare](#)
- [Housing](#)
- [Recreation](#)
- [Tourism](#)
- [Transportation](#)
- [Photo Gallery](#)

[About Us](#)

Read details about the Elgin Area Chamber, member benefits, and our advertising opportunities.

- [Join the Elgin Area Chamber](#)
- [Member Benefits](#)
- [Board of Directors](#)
- [Staff](#)
- [Directions](#)
- [Advertise With Us](#)

[FAQs](#)

Frequently asked questions about becoming a member of the Elgin Area Chamber.

[Links](#)

Review community and business links that are helpful to the Elgin Community.

- [Community links](#)

- [Business links](#)

[Store](#)

[Contact Us](#)

General form for contacting the Elgin Area Chamber.

If you would like more information about becoming a member of the Elgin Area Chamber, please fill out our [membership inquiry form](#) or call us at **847-741-5660**.

Improve the structure of your URLs

Creating descriptive categories and filenames for the documents on your website can not only help you keep your site better organized, but it could also lead to better crawling of your documents by search engines.

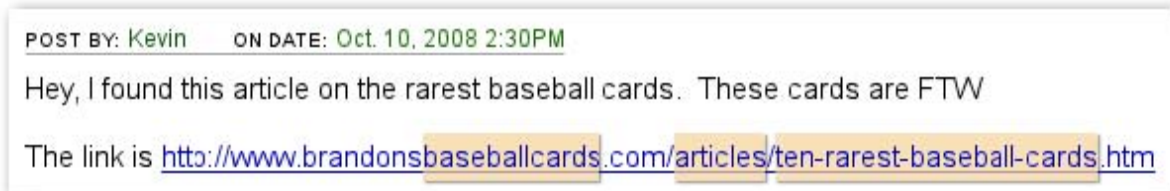
Also, it can create easier, "friendlier" URLs for those that want to link to your content. Visitors may be intimidated by extremely long and cryptic URLs that contain few recognizable words.



A URL to a page that a user might have a hard time with

URLs like these can be confusing and unfriendly. Users would have a hard time reciting the URL from memory or creating a link to it. Also, users may believe that a portion of the URL is unnecessary, especially if the URL shows many unrecognizable parameters. They might leave off a part, breaking the link.

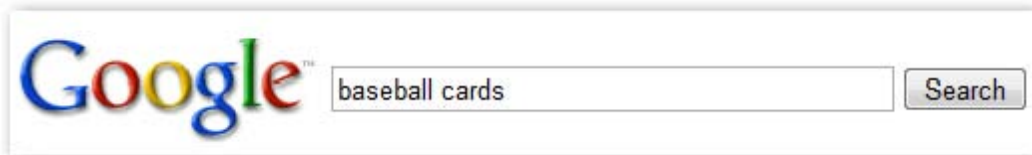
Some users might link to your page using the URL of that page as the anchor text. If your URL contains relevant words, this provides users and search engines with more information about the page than an ID or oddly named parameter would.



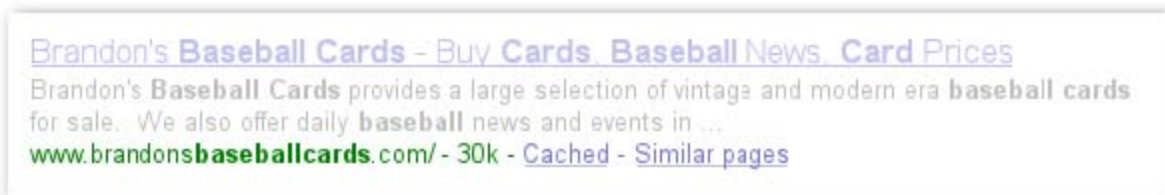
The highlighted words above could inform a user or search engine what the target page is about before following the link

Lastly, remember that the URL to a document is displayed as part of a search result in

Google, below the document's title and snippet. Like the title and snippet, words in the URL on the search result appear in bold if they appear in the user's query.

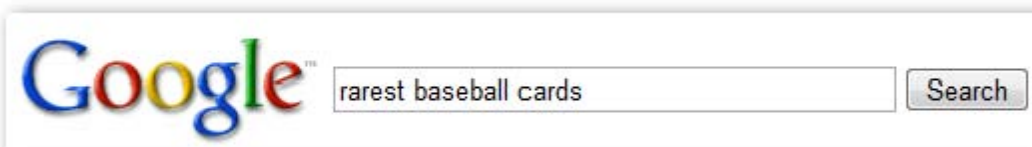


A user performs the query [baseball cards]

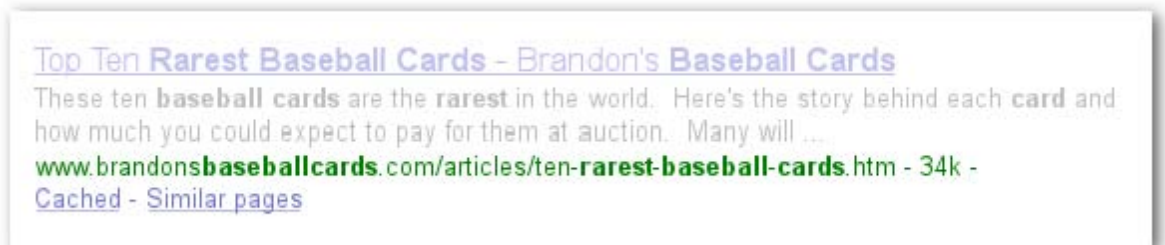


This homepage appears as a result, with the URL listed under the title and snippet

Below is another example showing a URL for a page containing an article about the rarest baseball cards. The words in the URL might appeal to a search user more than an ID number like "www.brandonsbaseballcards.com/article/102125/" would.



A user performs the query [rarest baseball cards]



A deeper page, with a URL that reflects the type of content found on it, appears as a result

Google is good at crawling all types of URL structures, even if they're quite complex, but spending the time to make your URLs as simple as possible for both users and search engines can help. Some webmasters try to achieve this by rewriting their dynamic URLs to static ones; while Google is fine with this, we'd like to note that this is an advanced procedure and if done incorrectly, could cause crawling issues with your site. To learn even more about good URL structure, we recommend this Webmaster Help Center page on creating Google-friendly URLs

<http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=76329>

Good practices for URL structure

Use words in URLs - URLs with words that are relevant to your site's content and structure are friendlier for visitors navigating your site. Visitors remember them better and might be more willing to link to them.

Avoid:

- using lengthy URLs with unnecessary parameters and session IDs (There's more about session id's later)
- choosing generic page names like "page1.html"
- using excessive keywords like "baseball-cards-baseball-cards-baseballcards.htm"

Create a simple directory structure - Use a directory structure that organizes your content well and is easy for visitors to know where they're at on your site. Try using your directory structure to indicate the type of content found at that URL.

Avoid:

- having deep nesting of subdirectories like ".../dir1/dir2/dir3/dir4/dir5/dir6/page.html"
- using directory names that have no relation to the content in them

Attracting links with folder structure

It helps if you can get links from other sites to inner pages of the site. This typically improves the link popularity of these pages which can improve rankings.

Webmasters are usually reluctant to link to inner pages because they are often moved or deleted causing broken links on their site.

However webmasters are much more likely to link to what looks like a major section on a web site as this is less likely to be moved or deleted such as,

<http://www.domainname.com/florida-restaurants>

Notice that in this URL there is no file name, no .htm or html etc. This is accomplished by changing the file name of the opening page within the folder to one of the default home pages for your server, typically index.htm (or index.html). Test the address to make sure it works. You may need to contact your webmaster to set this up to work at the folder level.

Custom “page not found” error handling - 404

Typically the inner pages of a web site get indexed by search engines and if you rename or delete them you may lose some prospective visitors.

The links to these “bad” pages can remain in the search listings for months.

When someone tries to click through to a page that has been moved or renamed they normally will receive a ‘page not found’ error.

See if your web server supports a “custom page not found” error page that is returned instead of the standard browser error page as the majority of people who reach a standard browser page from search results hit the back button to return to the search listings.

If your web server supports a “custom page not found” error page you can develop a web page with much of the same “look & feel” as other site pages with clear links to the home page and possibly a link to a site map or site search, etc.

Here’s an example from Adobe’s site

<http://www.adobe.com/badpage>

Note - **Do not click on the link above.** It will not work correctly unless you copy and paste it into a web browser.

Note - Tell your web hosting company to make sure this ‘page not found’ operates correctly and returns the proper browser error code (a 404).

Here’s an article about this topic in our blog:

<http://www.evisionsem.com/blog/2007/03/11/the-importance-of-an-effective-custom-page-not-found-error-page/>

Robots.txt Validation

A web site can and should employ a robots.txt file to exclude search engine crawlers from certain folders and files.

However, if implemented incorrectly search engines can be inadvertently excluded from site content.

Within Google's Webmaster Tools you can create, examine and test your Robots.txt file. These applications are currently in the Tools section of Webmaster Tools. Google's Webmaster Tools will also show you a list of URL's that are restricted but a Robots.txt file. Examine the list to see if any of these files should not be restricted. This listing is currently in the Diagnostics / Web Crawl section of Webmaster Tools.

More info on Robots.txt at <http://www.robotstxt.org/>

Page Content

Write easy-to-read text - Users enjoy content that is well written and easy to follow.

Avoid:

- writing sloppy text with many spelling and grammatical mistakes
- embedding text in images for textual content (users may want to copy and paste the text and search engines can't read it)

Stay organized around the topic - It's always beneficial to organize your content so that visitors have a good sense of where one content topic begins and another ends. Breaking your content up into logical chunks or divisions helps users find the content they want faster.

Avoid:

- dumping large amounts of text on varying topics onto a page without paragraph, subheading, or layout separation .

Use relevant language - Think about the words that a user might search for to find a piece of your content. Users who know a lot about the topic might use different keywords in their search queries than someone who is new to the topic. For example, a long-time baseball fan might search for [nlcs], an acronym for the National League Championship Series, while a new fan might use a more general query like [baseball playoffs]. Anticipating these differences in search behavior and accounting for them while writing your content (using a good mix of keyword phrases) could produce positive results.

Offer exclusive content or services - Consider creating a new, useful service that no other site offers. You could also write an original piece of research, break an exciting news story, or leverage your unique user base. Other sites may lack the resources or expertise to do these things.

Create content primarily for your users, not search engines - Designing your site around your visitors' needs while making sure your site is easily accessible to search engines usually produces positive results.

Avoid:

- inserting numerous unnecessary keywords aimed at search engines but are annoying or nonsensical to users
- having blocks of text like "frequent misspellings used to reach this page" that add little value for users
- deceptively hiding text from users, but displaying it to search engines

Use heading tags appropriately

Heading tags (not to be confused with the <head> HTML tag or HTTP headers) are used to present structure on the page to users. There are six sizes of heading tags, beginning with <h1>, the most important, and ending with <h6>, the least important.

```
</head>
<body>
<h1>Brandon's Baseball Cards</h1>
<h2>News - Treasure Trove of Baseball Cards Found in Old Barn</h2>
<p>A man who recently purchased a farm house was pleasantly surprised to find thousands of dollars worth of vintage baseball cards in the barn. The cards were found in newspapers and were thought to be in near-mint condition. After the cards to his grandson instead of selling them.</p>
```

On a page containing a news story, we might put the name of our site into an <h1> tag and the topic of the story into an <h2> tag

Since heading tags typically make text contained in them larger than normal text on the page, this is a visual cue to users that this text is important and could help them understand something about the type of content underneath the heading text. Multiple heading sizes used in order create a hierarchical structure for your content, making it easier for users to navigate through your document.

Good practices for heading tags

- **Imagine you're writing an outline** - Similar to writing an outline for a large paper, put some thought into what the main points and sub-points of the content on the page will be and decide where to use heading tags appropriately.

Ideally use one H1 tag on a page
Use the other Hx tags as appropriate

Avoid:

- placing text in heading tags that wouldn't be helpful in defining the structure of the page
- using heading tags where other tags like and may be more appropriate
- erratically moving from one heading tag size to another

Use headings sparingly across the page - Use heading tags where it makes sense. Too many heading tags on a page can make it hard for users to scan the content and determine where one topic ends and another begins.

Avoid:

- excessively using heading tags throughout the page
- putting all of the page's text into a heading tag
- using heading tags only for styling text and not presenting structure

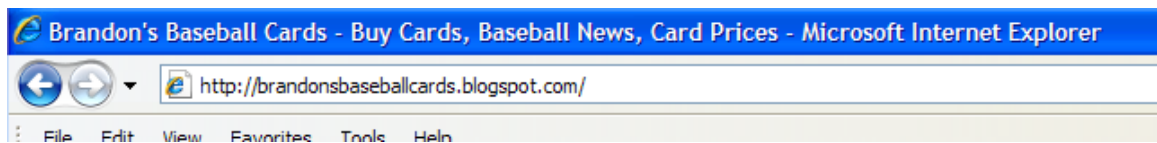
HTML Page Titles

All of your web pages should include an HTML Page Title. It's one of the most important elements in a web page for search engines.

```
<html>
<head>
<title>Brandon's Baseball Cards - Buy Cards, Baseball News, Card Prices</title>
<meta name="description" content="Brandon's Baseball Cards provides a large selection of baseball cards, including rookie cards, short prints, and more.">
</head>
<body>
...

```

The Page Title is displayed on the very top of most browsers when viewing a page (For example, "Acme Company – Manufacturers of line voltage meters").



A well-designed title can help attract visitors to your web site. It is usually the first line in search engine results

Brandon's Baseball Cards - Buy Cards, Baseball News, Card Prices
Brandon's Baseball Card BlogSpot has been positioned in the first page of Google Belgium search ... brandonsbaseballcards.com - **Brandons Baseball Cards Site ...**
brandonsbaseballcards.blogspot.com/ - 72k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

A properly developed title can dramatically effect your search engine placement since many search engines read and look for the words being searched on.

The major search engines usually display from about 65 to 115 characters of the HTML Page Title in the search listings. So the first 65-70 characters of an HTML Title should convey a "selling message" to entice people to visit the page and ideally include the one or two most important keyword phrases for the page.

Good practices for HTML page title tags

• **Accurately describe the page's content** - Choose a title that effectively communicates the topic of the page's content.

Avoid:

- choosing a title that has no relation to the content on the page
- using default or vague titles like "Untitled" or "New Page 1"

• **Create unique title tags for each page** - Each of your pages should ideally have a unique title tag, which helps Google know how the page is distinct from the others on your site.

Avoid:

- using a single title tag across all of your site's pages or a large group of pages

Use brief, but descriptive titles - Titles can be both short and informative. If the title is too long, Google will show only a portion of it in the search result.

Avoid:

- using extremely lengthy titles that are unhelpful to users
- stuffing unneeded keywords in your title tags

Make use of the "description" meta tag

A page's description meta tag gives Google and other search engines a summary of what the page is about. Whereas a page's title may be a few words or a phrase, a page's description meta tag might be a sentence or two or a short paragraph.

In some cases a page's description meta tag is displayed in search engine results where it can help entice searches to click through to the page.

```
<html>
<head>
<title>Brandon's Baseball Cards - Buy Cards, Baseball News, Car
<meta name="description" content="Brandon's Baseball Cards prov
</head>
<body>
...
```

Good practices for description meta tags

Accurately summarize the page's content - Write a description that would both inform and interest users if they saw your description meta tag as a snippet in a search result.

Avoid:

- writing a description meta tag that has no relation to the content on the page
- using generic descriptions like "This is a webpage" or "Page about baseball cards"
- filling the description with only keywords
- copy and pasting the entire content of the document into the description meta Tag

Use unique descriptions for each page - Having a different description meta tag for each page helps both users and Google, especially in searches where users may bring up multiple pages on your domain (e.g. searches using the site: operator).

If your site has thousands or even millions of pages, hand-crafting description meta tags probably isn't feasible. In this case, you could automatically generate description meta tags based on each page's content (see the section "Description Meta Tag and Content Management Systems" for more)

Avoid:

- using a single description meta tag across all of your site's pages or a large group of pages

Description meta tag length

When the major search engines display the meta description tag in the search results listings they usually display from about 150 to 250 characters of it. So try to make sure the first 150-160 characters of the meta description helps "sell" the page. It should work together with the HTML Page title to entice people to click through to the page..

Write better anchor text

Anchor text is the clickable text that users will see as a result of a link, and is placed within the anchor tag ``.

```
<a href="http://www.brandonsbaseballcards.com/articles/ten-rarest-baseball-cards.htm">Top ten rarest baseball cards</a>
```

This anchor text accurately describes the content on of an article page

This text tells users and Google something about the page you're linking to. Links on your page may be internal—pointing to other pages on your site—or external—leading to content on other sites. In either of these cases, the better your anchor text is, the easier it is for users to navigate and for Google to understand what the page you're linking to is about.

Good practices for anchor text

Choose descriptive text - The anchor text you use for a link should provide at least a basic idea of what the page linked to is about.

Avoid:

- writing generic anchor text like "page", "article", or "click here"
- using text that is off-topic or has no relation to the content of the page linked to
- using the page's URL as the anchor text in most cases (although there are certainly legitimate uses of this, such as promoting or referencing a new website's address)

Write concise text - Aim for short but descriptive text—usually a few words or a short phrase.

Avoid:

- writing long anchor text, such as a lengthy sentence or short paragraph of text

Format links so they're easy to spot - Make it easy for users to distinguish between regular text and the anchor text of your links. Your content becomes less useful if users miss the links or accidentally click them.

Avoid:

- using CSS or text styling that make links look just like regular text

Think about anchor text for internal links too -You may usually think about linking in terms of pointing to outside websites, but paying more attention to the anchor text used for internal links can help users and Google navigate your site better.

Avoid:

- using excessively keyword-filled or lengthy anchor text just for search engines
- creating unnecessary links that don't help with the user's navigation of the site

Good practices for images

Use brief, but descriptive filenames and alt text - Like many of the other parts of the page targeted for optimization, filenames and alt text (for ASCII languages) are best when they're short, but descriptive.

Avoid:

- using generic filenames like "image1.jpg", "pic.gif", "1.jpg" when possible (some sites with thousands of images might consider automating the naming of images)
- writing extremely lengthy filenames
- stuffing keywords into alt text or copying and pasting entire sentences

Alt Tags for the Image Links

Search engines can't read graphic images such as your logo or other images, but many will read the text contained in the "Alt tags" (Alternative image representation) for the images. You've probably seen Alt-tags before. On most browsers if you hold you mouse over an image a little text box appears.



An Alt tag for an image link

Alt tags are used for the following reasons –

- To provide additional information about what can be expected when someone clicks on an image that is used as a link.
- Accessibility. They are read by the readers used by the visually impaired etc.
- Visitors with slow speed connections can usually read the Alt tag before the image loads and determine what the image or image link is about from the Alt tag
- Some internet users, usually those with slow speed connections, turn off image downloading and rely on the Alt tags.

Search engines usually read the Alt tags for image links (images that are used as hyperlinks). Alt tags that include the keyword phrase being searched on can help improve the rankings for both the page(s) they are embedded in and the page they link to so this is an opportunity to include one of more important keyword phrases within the link to the pages, but DO NOT stuff keywords in Alt Tags.

Duplicate Content

Search engines do not want to display content that is identical or similar from multiple pages in search results. So when they detect duplicate content they typically apply a “filter” to one or more of the pages.

Typically search engines display only one or possibly two pages with the same or similar content. All other pages are not displayed, they are “filtered”, although there may be a link that allows the searcher to see all the pages as an option.

Duplicate content on your site

Duplicate filter issues on your own site are typically not a major problem as long as one or two of your pages are in the search results and these pages are current and effective at moving visitors down the “conversion funnel”.

However duplicative content can end up splitting your internal [Link Popularity](#) across multiple pages or multiple URL's.

From Google's SEO Starter Guide:

Provide one version of a URL to reach a document - To prevent users from linking to one version of a URL and others linking to a different version (this could split the reputation of that content between the URLs), focus on using and referring to one URL in the structure and internal linking of your pages. If you do find that people are accessing the same content through multiple URLs, setting up a 301 redirect from non-preferred URLs to the dominant URL is a good solution for this.

Avoid:

- having pages from sub domains and the root directory (e.g. "domain.com/page.htm" and "sub.domain.com/page.htm") access the same content
- mixing www. and non-www. versions of URLs in your internal linking structure
- using odd capitalization of URLs (many users expect lower-case URLs and remember them better)

See the “Issues for dynamically driven sites” section for more about how you can end up with multiple URL’s pointing to the same content.

Duplicate content on other sites

Content from your site that is used on other web sites can be also be an issue. It could mean that pages from the other sites appear in the search results while your pages are filtered.

- This issue is very typical in Affiliate Marketing programs where other sites use the same descriptions that are on your site.
- It’s also typical when you own multiple web sites that share content.
- Ecommerce sites often include the same text from their vendors that is also used on the vendor’s site and other reseller sites.
- In addition there are times when content from a site is used on other sites without permission.

Try to ensure that the content of pages on your site or on other sites such as vendors or affiliates is not largely similar.

HTML Validation

While not typically a problem for search engines it’s ideal to make sure your pages are validated HTML. In some cases broken tags etc can confuse search engines.

You can use an HTML validation tool such as this one (<http://validator.w3.org/>).

Web page load time.

How long a web page takes to load is both a usability issue and in some cases an issue for search engines. If it takes too long for a web page to load the search engine crawler may stop indexing the page.

There are plenty of online tools to check load times. Search on “web page load time”

Web Page Size

Do no let your web pages get too large. Again this is both a usability issue and in some cases an issue for search engines. Search engines typically index pages in chunks and

some search engines have limits on how much they will index from a page. The general rule of thumb is to keep web pages to 100kb or less.

Dynamically Driven Web pages

About Dynamic Pages & Session ID's

Often dynamically written web pages are created by passing database parameters to the database via the URL, such as this

<http://www.domainname.com/Viewitem.asp?idproduct=506>

The data after the "?", in this case "idproduct=506", is a parameter being passed to the content management system's database.

In the past search engines would not index pages containing characters such as, #&*!%?.

Today most search engines are indexing more and more dynamically driven pages.

However there are methods often used with dynamic sites that can create problems for search engines, including the way cookies are used (such as forcing cookies), the use of session variables, and the way parameters are passed via the URL

Problems with using session ids

Here is an example of a session id. This is a sample link to a web page:

<http://www.xxxxxxx.net/ME2/Audiences/dirsect.asp?sid=3370AA55639A4661943DEB7346B98488&nm=>

Notice the parameter in the URL that follows the question mark below;

[?sid=3370AA55639A4661943DEB7346B98488&nm=](http://www.xxxxxxx.net/ME2/Audiences/dirsect.asp?sid=3370AA55639A4661943DEB7346B98488&nm=)

Either this is a session id (SID) or it is acting as a session id

Here are the two primary problems with using session IDs

- Session IDs can create an infinite number of unique URLs to the same pages. Search engines may not index them at all, but if they do they tend to remove them quickly because of the duplicate content.
- Session IDs may expire and the page can't be reached.

Suggestions for dynamically driven pages

Here are some suggestions to address the issues with dynamically driven web pages.

- Do not use session ID's that are passed via the URL

The following is copied from Google's Technical Guidelines: for webmasters, <http://www.google.com/webmasters/guidelines.html>

Allow search bots to crawl your sites without session IDs or arguments that track their path through the site. These techniques are useful for tracking individual user behavior, but the access pattern of bots is entirely different. Using these techniques may result in incomplete indexing of your site, as bots may not be able to eliminate URLs that look different but actually point to the same page.

- When passing parameters via the URL, limit the number of parameters as much as possible. Search engines are indexing more and more dynamically driven pages but it's best to pass as few parameters as possible. Try to pass only one parameter or two at the most.
- Don't use "&id=" as a parameter in your URLs as this Google has ignored pages with this parameter in the past.
- Do not "force" cookies. Do not use a system that forces cookies to be accepted as search engines can not accept cookies.
- Employ a system that "masks" the parameters. There are techniques that can be employed, for example a techniques such as one named "mod Rewrite" that change dynamic URLs into URL's that look like static URL's.

So for example this type of system will change a URL such as this;

<http://www.domainname.com/Viewitem.asp?idproduct=506>

Into a URL such as this;

<http://www.domainname.com/Viewitem.asp/products/506>

This is a major task for an existing site and is best done when considering a site redesign.

This can work well for masking parameters; however session ids cannot be handled this way.

HTM Page Titles and CMS (Content Management Systems)

In dynamically generated pages the HTML Page Titles are often created programmatically. Here are some suggestions that should improve results.

One method for handling HTML Pages Titles programmatically is to have the system take a headline, usually the first headline on the page to build the HTML Page title, at least in part.

It is ideal if the CMS system allows the default HTML Page Title that is generated from the headline to be overridden. In this manner, when needed, you can modify the HTML Page Title to create a more effective HTML page title.

Description Meta Tag and Content Management Systems

It's ideal to have unique description tags on site pages that focus on the specific page subject. This can help sell people on clicking through to the page in those cases when the description tag is displayed in the search engine results.

If your site does use a CMS system to generate some of the site pages you could program the CMS system to take the first 200 or so characters from a section of text on the page use it as the description Meta tag for the page.

If you do this it's ideal to include an option to edit the system generated Description Meta Tag for any page. Then you can create better description tags if needed.

Keyword Meta Tags and Content Management Systems

A short list of keywords and phrases that might be entered into a search engine can be imbedded into web pages in a keyword Meta tag.

The keyword tag itself is not very important anymore as very few search engines read it. Typically we include the 4-5 most important phrases for the page, including common misspellings.

It's not easy to have a content management system generate an effective keyword tag from a page of text, however it is helpful if the content management system can allow the user to input a list of keywords into a keyword meta tag as an option.

Multiple Domain Names

There can be problems when more than one domain name points to the same web site.

One problem that can happen when multiple domain names point to the same site is that some pages can get indexed under one domain and some other domain names (search engines will typically not index the same page under more than one domain name).

Another issue is the dilution effect when some incoming links point to one domain name and some point to other domain names.

To get the biggest effect on search engine rankings you want most or all incoming links to point to one domain name.

Usually it's best to have one domain name for a site and use [301 permanent redirects](#) for all other domain names that point to the same site.

*Some of the content in this guide comes from Google's SEO Starter Guide,
<http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2008/11/googles-seo-starter-guide.html>*

About eVision

Since 1998, eVision has been delivering dramatic, measurable results for companies and organizations, from small to large, around the world.

eVision increases targeted traffic to a web and dramatically improves the site's ability to convert those visitors into leads and sales

More Traffic & More Conversions = More Business!

We drive targeted traffic to a web site through legitimate search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click (PPC) search engine marketing tactics and online promotion while working to ensure the web site turns those visitors into inquiries, qualified leads, and new business.

eVision uses its proprietary Conversion Point Architecture process to design user focused, search-engine friendly web sites that help convert visitors into customers. Conversion Point Architecture is a proven combination of art and science drawing from many fields including psychology, the usability field, web-buying behavior research and web technology and typically includes usability/conversion rate evaluations, target audience analysis, defining site objectives, user testing, advanced site analytics, complete content reviews, site architecture design, and site development.

eVision, LLC

179 East Main Street
Branford, Connecticut USA 06405

203 481.8005 • sales@eVisionSEM.com • www.eVisionSEM.com